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Library Marketplace — Patron Driven Acquisitions from the Point of View of a Traditional Vendor

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Column Editor's Note: *The following is adapted from the PVLR panel at ALA 2010 in Washington, D.C. — JR*

I have to admit that I have never seen an innovation take off as fast as Patron Driven Acquisitions (PDA) or alternatively, Patron Initiated Purchase of E-Books (PIPE) as we would call it in our acronym addicted ALA groups. I first heard about it at our last PVLR (Publisher Vendor Librarian Relations) committee meeting at Boston Midwinter, and now everywhere I go I am hearing about pilot projects. It has taken off so fast that we might soon need to change the acronym of our own group from PVLR to just PV...Patron Vendor...or eventually just P...Patron only.

This new formula definitely fits **Ranganathan's** five laws:

1. Books are for use.
2. Every reader his [or her] book.
3. Every book its reader.
4. Save the time of the reader.
5. The library is a growing organism.

Patron Initiated Purchase of eBooks meets all of these criteria, and we also know that researchers need quick access to information when they are on the track of a new discovery. But one thing we don't know is where this will all end. With extremely tight book budgets there is not a lot of room for arbitrary purchases. Have you ever tried returning an eBook? Most of the studies I have seen showing that 40-50% of book purchases never circulate in an academic library are very dated (**Hardesty**, 1981 & **Kent**, 1979). In our current economic environment I think librarians are already purchasing books on an "as needed basis," so the patron driven model is already in place.

We are at the beginning of a process that can best be termed "disintermediation." Just as travel agents, bookstores, record stores, and video stores got "disintermediated," or let's just call it dissed from now on, libraries may be facing a similar future. We must be on the lookout for who is going to get dissed next in this new patron driven process: The vendor? The librarian? The publisher? Higher Education itself? Surely not the patron.

The vendor will definitely get dissed if approval plans fall to patron driven models. Vendors are struggling to remain relevant in a market that has been flattened by the Internet. The librarians too are getting dissed as the patron takes over. Staff cuts could reach the point where the only librarian left would be the one cutting the checks to the aggregators. This has already happened to corporate libraries.

Will the publisher get dissed? Already **Amazon** and **Google** and **Barnes and Noble** are launching publishing initiatives. Smaller publishers are getting squeezed by shrinking margins extracted by resellers such as **Amazon**, which gets a 60% discount out of them. Then there is open access and self-publishing. Over one million additional titles were added to **Books in Print** last year. Many of them were reprints, but nearly two hundred thousand titles were self-published books. For better or worse eBooks will open the floodgates of self publishing.

But publishers may have the last laugh as distributors themselves get dissed. Already eBooks are showing up on special interest sites, and publishers are beginning to pursue micro marketing campaigns focused on special interest sites. In the academic sphere could we imagine eBooks migrating from libraries to course catalogues or to footnotes in journals and textbooks? And like a famous definition of **God**, eBooks are now everywhere and nowhere at once.

But the other part of the patron/eBook model, the eBook, has had a slower trajectory taking nearly ten years to become popular. It took **Kindle** and now the **iPad** to break things open for the general public and possibly for libraries, even though most eBooks are still read on PC's. But as a possible omen a two year old in her stroller was recently observed holding an **iPad** and interacting with it...scrolling and manipulating the screen with dexterous little fingers. I would have given her a pop-up book instead, but she is all ready for the future of books.



Unfortunately the eBook market has been marred by smoke and mirrors reporting on sales and availability. **Amazon** kicked it off by reporting that sales of eBooks had surpassed print books on its site, and then it turned out that they were including free books and copyright free books in their statistics. Then **Apple** claimed to have cornered twenty-two percent of the eBook market in a matter of weeks. Again the numbers were suspect as free books were being included. I am not a Luddite, and I do believe that the eBook moment has finally arrived, but accompanied by a lot of hype.

Think back to the launch of eBooks ten years ago and the breathless marketing of the digital book. Then it turned out that most of the books in the databases were older, out-of-date publications that publishers were happy to repackage as something new. Obfuscation still clouds the waters when dealing with eBooks. They are not easier to read, they are not easier to comprehend, they are not cheaper than print books (in the academic marketplace...yet!),

but they are easier to distribute. **Amazon's** distribution model may be why they got into the eBook market in the first place as we now see **Kindle** editions for **iPad**, **iPhone**, **Blackberry**, and for the PC, all free apps.

I recently published a book and downloaded it onto **Kindle** for free. The whole process took less than twenty four hours from download to worldwide exposure. Now even more people can skip buying my book. But it is much easier to promote without having to ship copies to all parts of the world, and it will always be there, never going out of print. I am hoping it stimulates my print sales by allowing readers to preview chapters before purchase. It is also a model librarians might consider as patrons could actually add their own books to the catalogue. More "library as publisher" opportunities.

Back to pricing. **Amazon** got into a bit of a kerfuffle with **Macmillan** about pricing models, and **Macmillan** sort of won by enforcing what is called an "agency model," meaning they get to name the price, not **Amazon**, but it only means that **Macmillan** will price out at \$14.99 instead of \$9.99 for its popular eBook titles. **Amazon** is pushing for even lower pricing, arguing that publishers will do better by selling in volume (and eBooks do reach a worldwide market). Such pricing wars haven't hit the academic market (yet). But there may be some movement in that direction if the "agency model" turns out to be deemed anticompetitive, as such pricing for paper books has been judged. We have seen **Amazon** and even **Wal-Mart** willing to take a loss on bestsellers to stimulate traffic to their stores. Could we see publishers go along with lower eBook pricing to stimulate sales of their other books? Just recently a price war broke out on e-readers. Will we soon see free eBook readers given away to stimulate eBook sales?

I recently did a quick comparison of pricing for some eBooks versus their print counterparts. Since so many eBooks are older imprints there are numerous print copies available on the used book market already. Books generally fall drastically in price once they are published as used copies hit the market. There is no such thing as a used eBook, yet. Another problem with eBooks is that publishers are holding back releasing the eBook until they have sold a sufficient quantity of the print version. Originally publishers were holding back three months, but now six months is more common.

What this does is give librarians the opportunity to obtain print copies inexpensively to accompany their eBook collections. Some consortia have even worked out arrangements where they are allowed to print two copies of each book in their eBook collection. eBooks are so unreadable that librarians should prepare for an uptick in requests for print copies

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of those books, since eBook companies generally limit printing of their books.

Traditional vendors have worked historically as an effective supplier of these one-off requests. Larger vendors have generally discouraged orders for older imprints and smaller presses, preferring instead to focus on approval and slip plans. Traditional vendors have generally been the go-to vendor for the harder to get items. We see this as a great niche to be in as approval plans are cut back. Also many of the smaller presses will not be publishing eBooks yet. In addition, traditional vendors usually offer an out-of-print service where they search multiple sites for out-of-print books looking for the best condition and price. This differs from single source suppliers. **Busca** is also exploring a printing service for free eBooks tied in with our book-binding partner, and we are also considering the **Espresso Book Machine** for the convergence of eBooks with Print-on-Demand services.

Traditional vendors, such as **Busca**, are pursuing a dual track strategy keeping print options open, while partnering with the major eBook aggregators. **Busca** is starting to add thousands of titles each month to its five million item database.

As a traditional vendor we foresee a continued demand for print as well as eBooks and simply want to be wherever the readers are.

Now for a Few Predictions:

- 1) All books published before 1923, the copyright free books, will all be free online. Once they are on the Internet they can't be controlled. Think what that will mean for the rare book trade and for interlibrary loan. Free eBooks will revolutionize the out-of-print market, but there will still be demand for print copies, just more inexpensive ones. Truly rare books may become even more valuable, but will be considered museum artifacts.
- 2) The "Orphan books" that have been scanned by **Google** will not be a significant addition to the literature. The period between 1923 and let's say 1960 was not an era of massive numbers of published books. The worthwhile ones are already in reprint. There's a reason the others are orphans.
- 3) Because of the advances in Print-on-Demand all books will be available in dual editions print and e. eBooks will be a way to see if you actually want a print copy.
- 4) eBooks will continue to come down in price. The last high-priced ones are science and technical publications, and they are morphing into databases anyway, searchable by keywords and topics. Pay-per-view seems to be the way they will go. Why own them?
- 5) Vendors will have to concentrate on value-added services to survive. With more staff cuts coming in libraries vendors have an obvious role to play. Handling rights and licensing could become a growth area for vendors.
- 6) Libraries will become "just in time" providers of information, whether eBooks or print books delivered from off site or by inter-library loan or by a device such as the **Espresso Book Machine**.
- 7) Colleges and universities will be under enormous pressure to offer more courses online and at a lower cost. The library will morph into an information creating center as well as a provider of information.
- 8) The Internet will go away and will be seen for the fad that really was...just checking to see if you were paying attention.

Rumors from page 77

were produced in 2009 by self-publishers and micro-niche publishers, according to statistics released this morning by **R.R. Bowker**. The number of 'nontraditional' titles dwarfed that of traditional books whose output slipped to 288,355 last year from 289,729 in 2008. Taken together, total book output

published books. **Jim Milliot** reports: "A staggering 764,448 titles

"The 50% mark neatly divides book buyers: 49% of book buyers came from households with incomes under that figure while 51% were from households that topped \$50,000 in annual household income." Milliot's Book Consumer Annual Review, p.12.

rose 87% last year, to over 1 million books." *blog.smashwords.com/2010/04/self-published-books-swamp.html*

Seems that **books** will be around for awhile. I have interspersed here in **Rumors** some quotes from the **2009 Book Con-**

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McFarland

This fall, we are publishing nearly
200 books about such topics as:

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I would like to close with a mention of a competitive reading device that was recently reviewed in *Publishers Weekly*:

"The power source is a mystery: there was no battery that our reporter could find, nor was he able to locate anything resembling a wireless antenna. Yet the bright ivory-white surface enabled our reader to make out 10-point text clearly in ambient light even at an astounding 20-degree reading angle.

Environmentalists will rejoice to hear that the device is almost completely green, containing no rare metals, toxic chemicals, sharp edges, or breakable components. However, its graphic display is so handsome that owners may prefer retaining it and integrating it as a decorating element in their homes.

And now for the best part. Fully loaded you would expect to pay... how much? \$300? \$500? But this gadget comes in at a brain-bending \$14.95! Watch it walk — yea, gallop! — out of the stores on launch day." (iFilch's Sneak Peek at Floppatronic's Reader, *Publisher's Weekly*, June 14, 2010) 🍷

John D. Riley's latest book of short stories is entitled "Superpostapocalypticexpiatidocious" and is available in print or on Kindle.